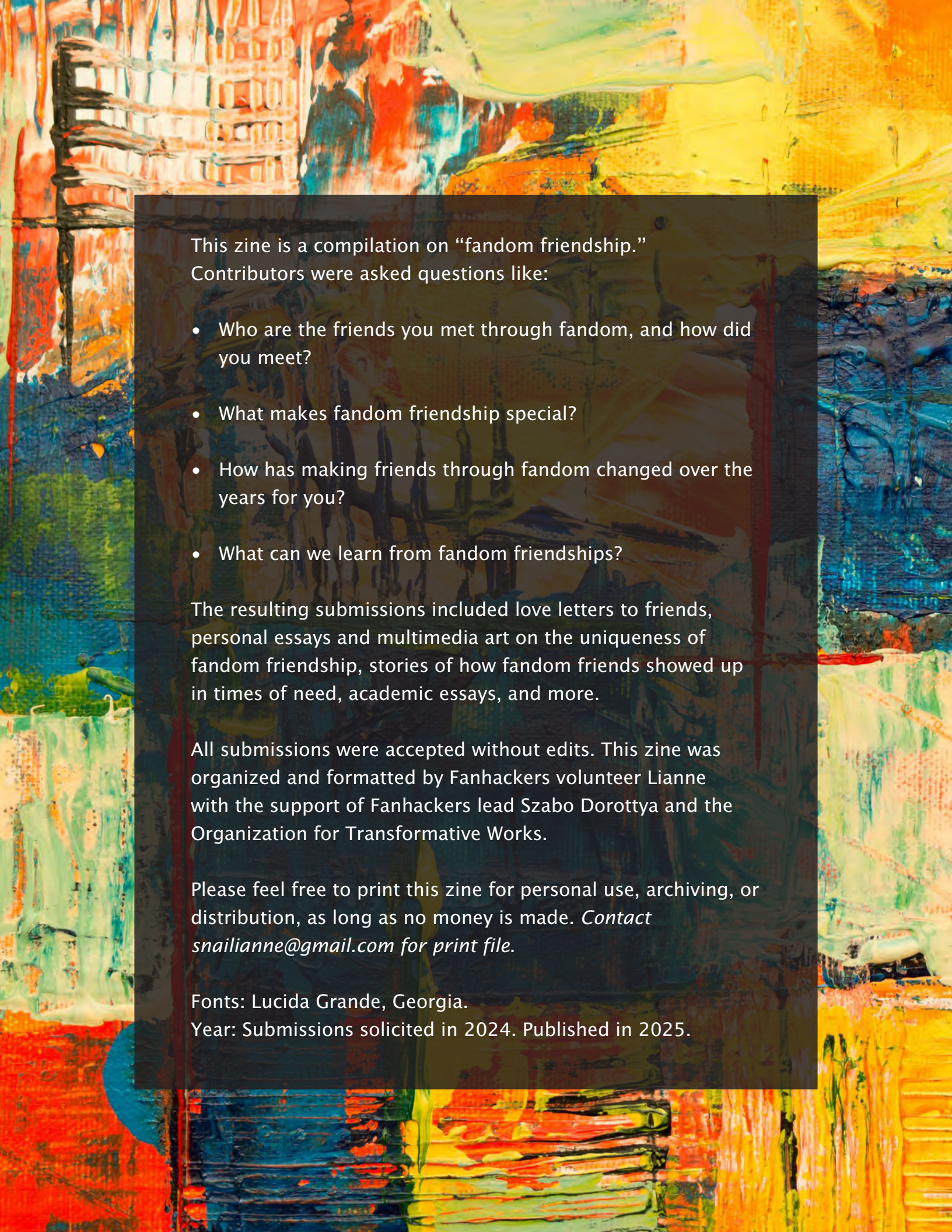


The background of the cover is an abstract painting. The top half features a mix of orange, yellow, green, and blue with visible brushstrokes and some darker, more textured areas. A prominent vertical red stroke is on the left. The bottom half, which serves as the background for the text, is a solid deep red. To the right of the red section, there is a vertical strip of the abstract painting, showing more yellow and orange tones with some green and blue accents.

Fandom Friendships

a z i n e

compiled by Fanhackers



This zine is a compilation on “fandom friendship.”
Contributors were asked questions like:

- Who are the friends you met through fandom, and how did you meet?
- What makes fandom friendship special?
- How has making friends through fandom changed over the years for you?
- What can we learn from fandom friendships?

The resulting submissions included love letters to friends, personal essays and multimedia art on the uniqueness of fandom friendship, stories of how fandom friends showed up in times of need, academic essays, and more.

All submissions were accepted without edits. This zine was organized and formatted by Fanhackers volunteer Lianne with the support of Fanhackers lead Szabo Dorottya and the Organization for Transformative Works.

Please feel free to print this zine for personal use, archiving, or distribution, as long as no money is made. *Contact snailianne@gmail.com for print file.*

Fonts: Lucida Grande, Georgia.

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Watching Bigg Boss in the Time of COVID

Anushka Bidani

*Author's Note: * Names have been changed to maintain anonymity.*

Nothing epitomizes the confluence of the sacred and the mundane like the dinner table.

Growing up, my dinner table had comprised my grandparents' bed, a pair of chairs, and a television. The five of us—my grandparents, parents, and I—would find our places at 8 pm, day-in and day-out, in our designated spots, sit back, eat, and talk. If I forget everything else, this is what I hope I will remember: the scratchiness of my grandmother's white lace mat under my thighs, torn-off bites of my roti sneaked into my parents' plates, and our voices meandering and melting into cacophonous melodies; all set to the score of *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*.

All the years of my middle-school were spent turning on the axis of this dinner table. On a rainy Sunday morning when I was twelve, we first stumbled across *TMKOC*. This was the period when our TVs had first been equipped with record/play-back technology. Intrigued by the (manufactured) sharpness of *TMKOC*'s portrayal of modern, middle-class, north-India, we decided to ritualise this accidental dinner-table screening into a habit. Every meal now was accompanied with inside-jokes traded between us, and the members of Gokuldham Housing Society.

Like smoking during work-breaks, this was a habit we collectively indulged, both as an excuse to stave off bore-

dom and to bond with each other. Unfortunately for me and my delicate sensibilities, my parents also shared another filthy habit: *Bigg Boss*. Aired from September till February every year, the reality show *Bigg Boss* had always been the bane of my existence and the object of all of my parents' desires. It was a show they refused to share with me, citing super-scientific reports claiming that watching people fight with each other all-day/ every day would incite me to do the same (of course, I did always retort with the question of how they managed to still be so civil with each year, despite heavy exposure to such harsh violence over almost a decade). And yet, like every curious baby smoker, they never

Bigg Boss tied me with my parents through a game of hide-and-seek—they, looking for the people they were beyond being my parents, and me, hiding from whatever I might find if I dared to look.

fully managed to curb my secondhand entanglement, the wisps of their excited voices (at the dinner table/the kitchen/the bedroom) winding their way into my corners. Unlike *TMKOC* which bound us into a shared universe of hilarity and shallow moralizing, *Bigg Boss* tied me with my parents through a game of hide-and-seek—they, looking for the people they were beyond being my parents, and me, hiding from whatever I might find if I dared to look.

In retrospect, it seems almost inevitable that one day, I would finally decide to swallow my bone of contention with *Bigg Boss* and decide to take an interest into which new subject the host Salman

Khan would be lecturing on that weekend. It was inevitable in the way most tragedies are: the pandemic happened, dad died, and the world as I had known it shifted forever.



I turned to *Bigg Boss* because I had nowhere else left to turn. Our dinner table was buried and gone; and there are only so many meals you can share in silence before the prospect of dinner itself starts reminding you of a funeral. After December, we had spent about six/seven months tied up in sorting all the legalities and paperwork (bureaucracy; nothing less than a pharikon post-trauma). But, by the time August had rolled around, I had run out of reasons to get out of bed. What was the point?

The only reason I had a bare facsimile of a telos in those days was because I was living with someone who was even sadder than me. I lost my father; my mum lost her best friend. My dad was the kind

of guy who could make you believe that it was possible to live within sandcastles and ride dragons. He had always believed so strongly in me that I never had any room left to doubt myself. After him, I was left holding nothing but sand with the germinating belief that everything I build will one day, inevitably, come raining down on my head. I could only choose to stop walking and collapse today or keep walking and crash tomorrow.

Inevitably then, when the list of contestants for *Bigg Boss OTT* released, I started making small talk with my mum about who was going to be her winning bet this year. Surprises of all surprises, our answers were the same (and we both were wrong. What a terrible joy).



The months rolled on. One day I woke up, and I was back in December, winding fairy lights across a potted-Christmas tree, ordering burgers for dinner,

and lining up the *Bigg Boss* telecast. Like I am wont to do, I had fallen head over heels: stunned, intrigued, and pulled wide-eyed into a universe I could never have imagined.

This was not my first taste of obsession with a wide-spanning pop culture universe. It wasn't even close to being my first rodeo with online fandoms. And yet. Yet, yet, yet. This was new in ways little had been new since I had become ostensibly disillusioned with most things during my teenage years. I was, for the first time in my life, speaking to fellow fans in a language we had created, not borrowed. Across social media, we would pass around the joint of our shared pleasures among each other, building a universe out of nothing but snippets of borrowed dinner table conversations.

We started talking to each other because we liked the same contestants. We kept talking because we ended up liking each other. Camara-

Having little inside jokes, listening to people open about their lives made me feel I was still somehow connected to humanity outside the walls of my home. A bunch of strangers randomly brought together by the internet made each other feel a little less lonely during a pandemic.

derie within online fandoms grows out of loyalty towards the same shared celebrity. Friendship within online fandoms, however, like in every walk of life, blooms and sustains because of reasons that extend much beyond group-support. Rashmi, a fellow fan I met during those days, shares this impression:

BB 15 was pretty weak and yet out of all the BB seasons, it is the only one I have seen in its entirety. It is also the only time I was part of a BB community online. I have never watched BB with my family at dinner time but I think watching the show's livefeed with this group of people, to the point of being sleep deprived, was my version of this experience. Most of us complained that we spent too much of our time on the group and yet we always came back, even, for a while, after the show ended. Personally, in a period of social isolation, being a part of those daily conversations

gave me the same sense of comfort I used to feel during idle chitchat sessions in family gatherings. Having little inside jokes, listening to people open about their lives made me feel I was still somehow connected to humanity outside the walls of my home. A bunch of strangers randomly brought together by the internet made each other feel a little less lonely during a pandemic. I think there's something intrinsically human about that.

Ahmar, too, echoes this sentiment:

The BiggBoss community was a place of comfort for me, a place I knew I could go without being judged. That's what made it special for me.

Lonely and bored like Rashmi and myself, Sanya* and Riya* had also turned to *Bigg Boss*, for the first time ever in their lives, because of the pandemic:

I wanted to escape reality. And submerge myself into something that didn't require much intellectual stimulation. Bigg Boss 15 seemed to hit that sweet spot. As time went by, a show that almost seemed like a casual fling, turned into an intense attachment. Not just with the contestants, but also with the people from different social communities...We discussed the show and how certain relationships resonated with our own experiences. We had arguments, we had banter, we shared laughs, we shared stress. We became a part of each other for 4 months. It was our own little bubble where there were no lockdowns, no restrictions—just an unabashed feeling of being yourself. You could say that we were trapped in our own world, but it was our escape.

I remember my brother randomly mentioning that the new season for Bigg Boss is all the rage. Having not watched last couple of seasons, I was definitely intrigued but not convinced enough. But just as one does, I did a simple search about the contestants and came across a thread dedicated to episode discussions. A bunch of hilarious strangers to discuss a weirdly insane and taboo show was all I needed, I guess. Initially I would just read through the threads, laugh my ass off and continue my day. I don't know what

made me one day participate. But when I did, there was no looking back. I made friends, I made enemies, we all went existential, and we shared some crazy stories besides Bigg Boss.

August through February, I probably spent more time talking to Rashmi, Ahmar, Sanya, Riya, et. al. than I did on the phone with my IRL best friends. Milestones like the first Diwali after Dad, the first Christmas, my mum's birthday, my birthday, New Year, and whatnot, are marked in my head through conversations and moments shared both with my mum and my cohort of online friends. By the time we had ticked into January, nearing the end of the show's season, everyone's nerves within our little bubble had been fraught, and tempers were always running high. Someone had even remarked once that it often feels like there's one game being played on our TV screens, and another in our comments section.

That is the ontology of all online fandoms. And yet, arguing into the night with

friends-turned-foes on account of the happenings of the latest episode felt intimate in ways little had ever seemed to me before, within any other fandom. Perhaps I had grown far too attached to these contestants. Perhaps I just had nothing better to do. And yet, since February 2021, I have written a thesis, finished my undergraduate degree, and started a new job — and yet, I am still here, knocking elbows and trading joints with the same old friends.

I asked Pranjal, who runs the fan page [pranish_bfs](#), about what has made her stick around even today, almost three years after the show first aired:

I started watching Bigg Boss randomly, not knowing much about the show or its contestants. However, as I stumbled upon Pratik and Nishant's interactions, their genuine camaraderie struck a chord within me. During the pandemic, when feelings of loneliness were at their peak, the bond and friendship between Pratik and Nishant from Bigg Boss became a source of solace and connection for

me. Their friendship transcended the confines of the reality show and resonated deeply with my own longing for connection. As the *Bigg Boss* season was reaching its conclusion, I had a sudden inspiration to create a fan page dedicated to PraNish, the beautiful friendship between Pratik and Nishant. What's more, receiving recognition from Pratik or Nishant filled me with even greater happiness. Along the way, I had the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals who shared an equal love for PraNish, and it was incredibly fulfilling to relate to them. Some of these connections grew so strong that I now find myself conversing with them on a daily basis. Now I can't fathom ever leaving this page. It has truly become my own little haven of happiness.

You will confess things to an online stranger-turned-friend that you could never fathom speaking out loud to the people who make up your offline life. Perhaps it's the anonymity, perhaps it's the inconsequentiality. All I know is that when I stumbled upon this group of people, I had been utterly drained by daily trying, and failing, to outrun the grief nipping at my heels. Saksham* had been in a similar state:

I have always been a big fan of BB since S4. But S15 was different due to many reasons. It was somewhere in October that I watched the first episode because of one familiar contestant 'Pratik Sehajpal', as I had watched him in other shows as well. But I was still not a regular watcher. One day, I came across a community for *Bigg Boss* where other fans used to discuss the show, and from there I came to know about the 24hr live channel. Slowly, I got engrossed in the live channel as well so that I could talk to these fans. I guess I was just trying to escape the real life where I had suffered personal loss. I was so involved in the show that I used to support my favourite contestants whole heartedly, and used to argue with some fans as well when they spoke bad about him/her. This was a 3 month long journey which helped me recover from that loss to some extent and also gave me some cool online new friends during that journey. Yeah, still in touch with many of them.

Talking helped. In those months when it had felt like everything, and everyone, in my life was stuck orbiting this tragedy, I managed to find some measure of respite by screaming with these strangers online about party outfits, New Year resolutions,

and how anyone (*coughs* Pratik Sehajpal *coughs*) could possibly be so utterly obsessed with checking out their hair every ten seconds.

In many ways, submerging myself within the universe of *Bigg Boss* with my friends during the pandemic let me do something I had never done before and have never been able to do again: stop time. For a few months, I was able to hide from the cloud of existential despair that had seemed to follow me everywhere before August. I stepped out of my life, my relationships, myself; and sneaked away to stack my plate at the dinner table that we had all created around these guys.

Our first dinner table is extremely formative. A repetitive prayer: When the day is done, who waits for you? Are they enough? Two years ago, the sky fell down upon my first dinner table; and some days I feel like I was buried with it. But those are the bad days, and every one of us has some of those, every once in

a while. On the other days, I know I can call up my best friend, and she will always set a plate for me. Mum and I can swap china for plastic, and spend our night tucked in with a movie. I can laze around my dorm room, gulping sprite with shots of Succession.

I can do all this—but only because sometime, while obsessively keeping up with these guys and chit-chatting about them with my friends,

I somehow got the idea that I can always, always, build a new table. Sometimes nothing happens, and yet, you wake up one day and realize that your chair doesn't fit you anymore. Sometimes everything happens, and yet, you still want nothing more in the world than to come home and eat at the same table. If I forget everything else, this is what I hope I will remember: you can always start over.

Fandom Is the Friends We Made Along the Way

Olivia Fox

The search for community is an instinctive practice that we, as humans, will find ourselves engaging in at one point or another. We are born with the impulse to find common ground or share bits of ourselves with the people we meet in any way we can. An example of community that has been largely accepted and celebrated by the public is sport. Sporting fans, a predominantly male demographic, engage in the same behaviours as that of a media fan, for example: buying merch, attending events, or engaging with other supporters online. However, the same acceptance has not been extended to fans of media items. The label of “fan-girl” has seen an almost derogatory shift in its meaning. It has become synonymous with “crazed,”

or “obsessive.” It is the association that fan culture has with young women, a demographic the world loves to hate, that perpetuate the stigmas that prevent members of fandom from openly speaking about what they love. It is a shame that the word “fan” has come to carry such negative connotations when, at its heart, it is simply about the innately human desire for community.

With the negativity that deems public expressions of fandom as being obsessive or abnormal, many fandom friendships are formed online, where the choice of anonymity is afforded if they choose to take it. Regardless of how one may stumble into these friendships, it is the need for community that acts as the driving force. This

unique brand of connection within fan communities is summed up here by Henry Jenkins: “Even before there were digital networks, fandom’s interpretive communities came together around the desire to discuss favorite media texts. Fandoms developed distinctive patterns of interpretation, modes of social interaction, and forms of cultural production which emerged from the community’s shared passions and interests.” (Jenkins) Friendships created through fandom are unique because they are a love that is built on love.

I met one of my very best friends on the first day of classes in my second year of university. I walked to the front row of large auditorium, speaking to a friend very loudly and without any sem-

blance of shame, about the infamous trio of television shows that Tumblr dubbed “Superwholock,” a combination of the names *Doctor Who*, *Supernatural*, and *Sherlock*. Five rows behind me sat a person listening to my incoherent ramblings. The next week, I wanted to sit as far away from the front of the room as possible so I could eat my lunch without the burning feeling of sixteen sets of judging eyes on me as I fail to discreetly unwrap tin foil. When I looked to the back of the room, a girl with perfectly applied eyeliner and a horror movie T-shirt sat with a sticker-adorned laptop. I sat next to her and introduced myself, then she did the same. Once the formalities were out of the way, she asked me if I was the person who was talking about Superwholock in class the week before. Admittedly, I was slightly embarrassed that I have yet to find a way to control the volume of my voice, but I told her that it was in fact me. We spoke about that for a while before I glanced over at the stickers

on her laptop. Each of them representing a band, or a show, or a movie that I liked as well.

The more we spoke, the more of our overlapping fandom experiences we discovered. It is one thing to enjoy a media object, but it is an entirely different thing to be a fan of it. This sentiment is explained in this excerpt from Henry Jenkins “In everyday speech, the word “fans” has a broad meaning, used loosely to describe anyone who forms an intense affective bond with a particular property, whether or not they share those feelings with anyone else. (...) Fandom, on the other hand, refers to those who claim a common identity and a shared culture with other fans. (...) a fandom is better understood

as a more expansive subculture, whose members engage with a broad array of different media objects but who share traditions and practices built up over many years.” (Jenkins) It is fair to say that our friendship was formed the way that many online friendships are formed, but in-person. I made a comment, she responded, we began talking, and we have not run out of things to say. In that moment, it was like I had met someone who had always been in my life.

The foundation of our friendship is the shared experiences we have in fandom. Although our friendship began two years ago, there are media moments that link our lives together; making it feel as though we have always been around for each other.

The foundation of our friendship is the shared experiences we have in fandom. Although our friendship began two years ago, there are media moments that link our lives together; making it feel as though we have always been around for each other.

er. For example, both of us could tell you exactly where we were when “The Day of the Doctor” episode of *Doctor Who* aired. It is the sense of community that we have both felt in our fandoms that replicates the feeling of life-long friendship. There is a warmth that accompanies being seen completely by another person from the lens of their own personal experience and an inherent humanness that drives us to share our experiences and stories with one another. It is generally recommended that you keep friends that hold similar interests to your own. We are the sum of all of the media that we have consumed, meeting someone with the same interests as your own is an indicator that you will get along. There is a satisfaction to the knowledge that you will be able to make a reference to your favourite piece of media and trust that the other person will truly appreciate the remark. That degree of visibility makes friendships within fandom so special.

I often find myself reflecting on my friendship with M and how rare it is for us to have found another person in our lifetimes that is so much like us, yet different enough that we never seem to tire of each other. Loving something is one thing but loving something with someone you love is entirely more special. We often accept, with little to no push-back, that a “soulmate” is someone that one falls in love with romantically. An idea that seems to affect only a select few and can oft be found in a fantasy novel as the loophole, some brand of an all-powerful love that saves the protagonist from a sour ending. I take no issue with the notion of a “soulmate.” I believe that the concept, albeit presumably rare, is a fine one. However, very little thought is given to a friendship that is just as good as the idea of the traditional soulmate gets.

When meeting someone new, we often ask them what their favourite musicians, movies, television shows are. The reason for this, even if it is

Given the stigmas around fan culture, particularly in the case of young women in fandom being labelled as crazed or obsessive, a friendship built around a fan community provides the reassurance of a judgement free environment.

a subconscious one, is that search for shared experience and community.

Given the stigmas around fan culture, particularly in the case of young women in fandom being labelled as crazed or obsessive, a friendship built around a fan community provides the reassurance of a judgement free environment. It promises each person in the friendship that they will be respected, and not patronized, if they wish to speak about a piece of media that has impacted to them deeply. Life is far too short to dampen a love that you feel very strongly. A fandom friendship is a love for something that creates

a love for someone else. It comes to us without shame, or pretense. It values intensity, and it prefers honesty. There is a stigma around fandom as being frivolous or ridiculous, especially because it is often linked to young women and the public has little respect for young women, despite them being the driving force behind popular culture since the word itself was invented. With that being said, there is a delightful comfort that the conversa-

tion provides. It is void of judgement. In my experience with a fandom friendship, I feel as though I am permitted to express my thoughts and feelings. I never feel that I need change who I am to be valued. M expects me to be myself and I expect the same of her. There is no conversation too big, too small, or too strange. Our past experiences in the same fan communities allowed us to enjoy an open expression of the things that we love.

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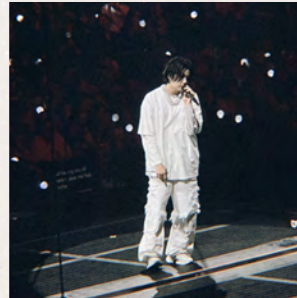
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Fandom *Friendship*

some friends met along the way became..



lifelong



cherished



long-distanced



passerby

—at the same time.

by: Melle Cee



Author's Note

Greetings, fellow fans!

In this zine, I will share my experiences with fandom friendships through poetry, stories, pictures, and personal realizations. As someone who has been involved in fandoms since the emergence of social media in the early 2000s, I

have had many encounters with diverse friendships—— some became lifelong and have stood the test of time, others that I cherish deeply because of fandom. I've also had long-distance friends I've met around the world who have become my acquaintances and many passersby.

I value each friendship because we share the same experiences and memories we've created together through various fandoms. And I will forever be grateful for those encounters. It only shows fandom goes beyond their idols, but it is also about memories with strangers, communities built, and fellow fans that enhance our experiences. Reflecting without all these, I won't stick around for so long. I hope that sharing my personal experiences with fandom friendship through this zine will debunk the negative misconceptions of the fandom community that have been spreading. Being in a fandom community is a sense of belonging and a safe space for some that many wouldn't understand.



My Lifelong Friend

by: Melle Cee



My lifelong friend, Sheena,
whom I met in 2012.
That year, many feared the world would end,
but instead, I found a friend you.

Through many fears navigating the online world,
concerns about dangers like fraud,
our friendship remains true,
fostered through our fandom community.
I'm glad I found a friend in you.

Living in the same country as the Philippines,
divided by islands that we've yet to cross.
The connection from calls turned to video calls,
and updates on social media,
kept us close, even apart.
In a toxic society on social media,
I'm glad I found a friend in you.

From teenagers and now adults,
we've witnessed each other grow,
through victories and heartbreaks,
From constant texts to occasional greetings,
I'm glad I still could find a friend in you.

I wish to witness each other's success and
milestones,
Though we've yet to meet,
After a decade of friendship,
I know our friendship is lifelong.
I am glad I have found you, my friend.





Cherished Fandom *Friends*

Of all my fandom friendships, this one is not grounded in fandom but in high school. I have three of them, each of whom I met in different years of high school.

First is Gayle, I met her in 7th grade during school sports week. Not too long after I approached her, we started gushing about our idols. That short interaction ended, and we didn't interact again until 11th grade when we became friends because we belonged in the same class.

Second is Joanna, I met her in 8th grade, and as we belonged to the same fandom community until 11th grade, she became instantly my closest friend. We also belonged to the same fandom community in One Direction, but our friendship depended on the fandom itself.

Third is Katrina, she was introduced to me when she moved to our school during the 9th grade. I've never had the same class as her, but I often hang out in the same group. I consider her more of an acquaintance than a close friend.

In 2022, I started posting and liking pictures of BTS on social media, which made me more active. I felt nostalgic as many of my former classmates and friends started to express their love for the group. Through connecting with Joanna, I became close to her. Katrina answered all of my questions as I was new to the fandom, and before long, the three of us were organizing a get-together for my trip. After reconnecting with Gayle, who was also a fan, we became close by reminiscing our humiliating experiences and memories also joined our trip.

Currently, even though BTS is on hiatus to serve in the military, we stay in touch through group chat, exchanging random messages and planning watch parties. Both Joanna and Katrina moved to different cities. Joanna kept us updated on her life after moving to her corporate job. Katrina became a digital nomad and my travel companion. We also plan to travel internationally and watch BTS concerts together. While Gayle, a medical student who's the only one remaining in the city, balances her hectic schedule by sending BTS updates and attending our watch parties whenever she can.

Through this friendship, I've come to realize how much fandom has contributed to my personal growth. Sharing our interests and feeling a sense of belonging within the same community has allowed us to build strong connections.

Long-Distanced *Friends*



Three of us met up again the day after the concert.

Made sure to meet up before Yuiko went back to Tokyo.



I can say that we don't interact with each other as much as we used to, and our friendship mainly relies on social media to keep us updated on each other's lives. Long-distance friendships tend to have low maintenance friendship, but we hold onto the memories we've shared, which we can recall when we finally see each other again.

I met Yuiko and Ninita in 2022 at the Seventeen concert in Toronto. Yuiko moved to the city for her summer English program, and Ninita is studying in Toronto as an international student.



Me and Yuiko at Disneyland! Coincidentally, exactly a year after we met at the concert. Meanwhile, Ninita is still keeping in touch occasionally as she is back in India.

Passerby Friends



As someone who goes to concerts alone and encounters passersby, friendship is common. Those people whom I met in concerts were people with whom I interacted but didn't have that strong connection. Having a passerby friendship encounter isn't all that bad because you meet diverse kinds of people and learn so many stories about their own fan stories. Sometimes, we even get to know their personal life stories and how the fandom community impacted their lives. Being surrounded by the same fandom community gives a feeling of belonging and a feeling of positivity, and radiating excitement adds to this. Realizing each one of us has our own lives and being connected through fandom is something I value. Seeing these people in the same fandom sometimes made me realize how our idols impacted our lives in so many different ways.



THANK YOU FOR
READING MY ZINE.
MAY WE ALWAYS FIND
A FRIEND IN OUR
COMMUNITY WHO
BRINGS US COMFORT,
ESPECIALLY DURING
DIFFICULT TIMES.

AND TO MY FRIENDS,
I AM GRATEFUL THAT
I HAVE MET YOU.

To What Extent Does Fandom Friendship Change Your Life?

Kalincka

When I meet my best friends, I am fourteen years old. I don't know it yet—but I click on that little blue icon with an F written in white, and later on I click on that little blue icon with a T written in white, and later on on that little blue icon with a white bird inside.¹

When I meet my best friends, I am fourteen years old, and I've begun asking the centerpiece question.²

To What Extent Does Fandom Friendship Change Your Life?

An Introduction to Fan Fiction—Stories Can Be Never Ending?!

I learn about fan fiction when I am twelve. I live in

the south of France, in a rural area, and I have recently become obsessed with a little show called *Merlin*, produced by the BBC. At that time, the series' final season has come out, except this—it doesn't air in France. So what my little self choses to do is to binge the final season on a somewhat legal website, without subtitles, and with Colin Morgan's lovely but undecipherable Irish accent flooding her ears. It leaves her wrecked for a week.

You know how BBC *Merlin* ends? Sorry if you do. But I hope you'll grasp the poetics of it thrusting me into the fandom world, that is to say a place where we refuse to give stories complete closure.

So, I do what any other desperate fan does. I search for a season 5 confirmation. I find that people disagree with the showrunners' choice. I agree with them. I learn about Fan Fiction. I start doing Fan Fiction.³ My avatar is a simple thing—a white bunny popping out from a circle. I choose a blue background for it.⁴

I give myself a name, *Kalincka*, and I start posting.

Stories Are Being Given to You—You Give Back.

French Fan Fiction is rare when it comes to English-speaking fandoms. It's hard to grasp a language you're not familiar with and make it the foundation

of your new favorite on-line space, especially when you've grown up expressing yourself in another one. But I want to contribute to fandom spaces, too. I find the concept of being able to contribute to your favorite world groundbreaking. Preserving the Canon and assigning multifaceted lives to it means something to me. I have never read Roland Barthes at that point, and I won't know a thing about the Author's Death for many years to come, but I know for certain that we are creating, and therefore it is ours, and everyone's at the same time. You make the stories you've been given your own, but it's never yours to keep. This is caring. It has to be shared.

When the time comes during my studies, it will seem natural to specialize myself in translation.

I turn bilingual in the process. I click on the Tumblr icon. I want to read more than what people write; I want to read what they say, too. At that point in time, in

2014, another little something is happening in France, called the rise of YouTube shows. They're not called influencers yet—it's just unemployed people talking to their cameras and making jokes. A part of those YouTubers chooses to stage their comedy; they play characters on screen, use a persona. Their ecosystem is small and most of them collab with each other. You watch one, you watch everyone. I juggle between American, British and French YouTubers' content rather than watching TV. I watch web series, too.

And I think—it's all scenarized, right? These are characters, alright? You know what I've learned you can do with characters that don't necessarily belong to you?

I click on the blue icon with a white F in the middle.

I Hold My Hand Out and Fandom Grips Me Tight

There is no dedicated fan-

When you have little content for your obsession, you end up knowing every author that falls within the scope of it.

dom page on FanFiction. Net when I search for it. You have to click on the "Misc" category, then on the "Web Shows" one, and even when you do so you end up on a page gathering stories in multiple languages. I switch on the French filter.

There are people here!

People speaking my language!

Some of them know Merlin, too!

In retrospect, this is how it starts—finding a group with the same codes as English fandoms', smaller in size, double in passion. When you have little content for your obsession, you end up knowing every author that falls within the scope of it. I com-

ment as much as I can, and in return I get comments, too! From May to August 2014 there is a steady pool of writers and readers growing, forty people tops from where I can see them in my little corner of the Internet.

In September 2014, we move to Twitter.

I say “we move”, like one leaves a studio for apartment-sharing. The majority of authors I met on FanFiction.Net create a social network account to keep up with our favorite YouTubers’ newest projects, but also take the opportunity to connect with fellow writers and readers. It fuels the positive cycle of engagement to the point where every story on FanFiction.Net’s Misc’s Web Shows’ French page gets announced in a tweet that gets retweeted that gets comments, and our fanfics are graced with, in worst cases, a ratio of ten comments per chapter. I can keep on writing in French! There are people out there loving it, in fact! They like what I write

and I love what they write. We exchange fanfics as gifts for birthdays, we laugh and we cry in DMs, it’s always about what Dean and Castiel have done or what the new *What The Cut?! will bring on the screen*. It feels good, no, even better: it feels meaningful.

We organize challenges for Halloween and Christmas seasons. I host the 2015 edition on my own profile⁵, then receive applications in the comments of the first chapter announcing the project, then dutifully publish every fic under a dedicated chapter on D-day. There is not a single story that hasn’t been reviewed by five or six people.

I’ve also been writing for a YouTube fandom that, to my knowledge, hasn’t got any other French fan than me producing fan content of it. It becomes a running joke in my circle of internet friends, but then—on June 17th 2015, I get a private message on FanFiction.Net, telling me they’ve discovered the show

thanks to my writing and would like to write about it too, and would it be okay if I added you to my disclaimer to make sure people don’t think it’s plagiarism?⁶

Meet Phi—the guy that will be my roommate in seven years.

A Story of Our Home

Phi and I talk almost every day after that, and not just about YouTube. On Twitter it’s easy to chat, and my timeline feed is a saloon bar. I push the swinging doors and simply listen to the excited rumors of individual tweets like I’m leaning at the counter; sometimes a conversation strikes up beside me and I join in, and there are times during which I just giggle reading a string of back-and-forth banter that can gather up to six people at the same time. Circa 2016,

Meet Phi—the guy that will be my roommate in seven years.

I regularly talk with twenty people and keep sight of the other half that makes up our fandom. Some of us opt for a private Twitter account—talks are getting deeper, tackling grades, family, people from everyday life, LGBT+ self-questioning, anxiety, present issues that we fear will become future ones. I go to a boarding school far from home, my online friends safely tucked away in my phone, with the knowledge that I'm a tweet away from not facing this all alone.⁷ Our community is small, allowing for familiarity. Mind you, this blooms from guys talking to their cameras.

Hanging out on the timeline is not enough. Skype calls happen. We see each other's faces for the first time on screen after spending one to three solid years of digital companionship. I ask to go to a convention in Paris for my 15th birthday, with my mother worriedly coming along, who the hell are those Internet people speaking with my minor daughter. She only realizes once I'm stand-

ing in the middle of a dozen-people crowd, the youngest being fourteen, the oldest being twenty-eight, exclaiming "Oh, you're Kalincka! I've read your story, and I loved it!"—and me, overjoyed with a thousand thank-yous tumbling out of my mind, only speaking back, "You're Beau Chaton! I've read your story, and I loved it!". She hears me getting called by a name she's never given me. She cries a little on the way home. I hold her hand. Fandom friendships shape your parents, too.

Life goes so fast with them. I meet Rainbow, a fanartist that will grow to be my girlfriend of three years. We break up but don't part, because we care so much still. I meet Siffly, a fellow writer who stumbled into my comments in 2014 and embodies my first Internet friendship⁸. I meet Charles, someone I will love with all my heart for all my life. I meet Meta, five years my elder⁹, yet we lose our minds all the same when Destiel turns canon. I meet Elou, one of the smartest

persons I've ever talked too, who showers me in compliments in each of her reviews leaving me squealing. I meet discreet Merle, I meet buoying Lucie, I meet ardent Nour, I meet Emma I meet Malou I meet Tao I meet I meet—and I don't know when meeting turns into keeping. But I know this:

- I spend an unfathomable amount of money and time on train trips;
- I get to see 13 different cities in the span of 5 years;
- Our original fandom branches into an approximate amount of 456 new ones;
- I don't keep up with all of them¹⁰;
- There are more than two hundred postcards in my desk drawer;
- I learn Portuguese for a Twitter mutual living across the ocean;

- I get recognized at a movie premiere for which I've been writing fan fiction for 7 years;
- Fandom brings me an ugly wolf shirt I adore;
- The best night of my life is spent witnessing Bill & Frank go canon with an Elsa as delirious as me and staying up until 6 a.m. to talk about it¹¹;
- There are people that I meet and let go of;
- I'm so glad for those who stick.

There is another first time, when fandom friendship happens to me in real life. In 2018, I'm starting my first year of prep school and sit in front of a certain someone I directly clock as a Tumblr user. I blink, and we end up talking about Dan & Phil like we've been on each other's screens for ten years, going through the same TV shows¹². Those we don't know we end up exchanging to one another, it's inevitably

customary. Claire becomes special to me in the closest way. It's a rule now—start on these holy foundations, and I kind of refuse to leave.

In Conclusion—I Wrote a Little Something Too

In 2023, I could only finish my translation and linguistics studies by writing and submitting my master's thesis. The prerequisites were the following:

Choosing a subject encompassing an economical, technical or legal field.

Choosing a source text that has never been translated before, for which the student will elaborate a translation strategy and glossaries.

Choosing a subject of proven interest pushing students to think about innovative translation issues. Subject will be explained in layman's terms for any translator to easily grasp the chosen field.¹³

My chosen theme could only be:

Fan Fiction, Transformative Works and Copyrights

Or, as its original title stands,

La fanfiction, l'œuvre transformative et les droits d'auteur

Look it up if you like. Look up the acknowledgement page, too. But beware—like everything dear that's ever happened to me in fandom spaces, it's written in French.

To pursue those studies, I moved in with Phi in Paris three years prior. We've been living as roommates, and there's something so freeing in bringing your virtual safe space into reality by gaining independence with someone you've already lived with remotely for seven years. We talk about what we write, him original fiction and me fanfics, because I cannot let go of the medium that brought him to me, we joke about crackships and picture a follow up on that latest show we've watched, we bet on popular pairings and

theorize about the miracles it took for us to keep in touch with a twenty people group. It's home. Whenever we talk it will always be.

As I type this our shared life comes to an end—I'm moving out and he will too.

Know what we did before we left?

We met the YouTube guys thanks to whom we've met. They organized a gig at Amsterdam¹⁴ and, with our real adult money that we make, we took the train and ended up there, in a concert room partying to songs we learned when we were fifteen, songs that prompted fanfics that prompted conversations that prompted a friendship that

prompted my life. When we stay to chat with them at the end, on June 2024, nine years in the following of one little private message in June 2015, I don't think they grasp how much their own fandom changed my—our—lives. But we know.

The Canon is not ours, but we weave our very own story with it.

Notes:

- 1 Blue will be an important color.
- 2 Looking back on it, I was building the answer as well.
- 3 It happens on FanFiction.Net. In my corner. In French. I am still unable to listen to Colin Morgan's English and fully understand what he says. See Hickey, Raymond (2004). "Irish English: Phonology". In Kortmann, Bernd; Schneider, Edgar W. (eds.). *A Handbook of Varieties of English*. Walter de Gruyter.
- 4 I was jarred when I learned about the English conception of blue. It never meant sadness to me. It was just my favorite color, and it kind of gave me my favorite friends too. Then I learned about the English "true blue" expression, and it suited me much better.
- 5 At that time, we don't know about Ao3, and it is impossible to create multi-author works on FanFiction.Net.
- 6 Plagiarism! A laughable idea in the face of transformative works.
- 7 The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s oldest relevant definition for *community* sets geography at its core: "A body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity." And yet. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "community (n.), sense 1.2.b," September 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1031159519>.
- 8 We turn 10 this year!
- 9 When we meet, I am in middle school and she is pursuing higher education. I attended her wedding.
- 10 I do try! See ワンピース, *One Piece*, created by Eiichirō Oda (1997–now).
- 11 We had classes at 8 a.m.
- 12 They've been through *Merlin*.
- 13 See Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (2022). *Guide d'élaboration du mémoire de Master 2022–2023*.
- 14 Making it the 14th city I've visited thanks to fandom now.

Ten years ago I meet my friends



Ten years ago I meet my friends.

They are witty, and talented, and kind, and I don't know it yet but

they

change my entire

world

Wait. no. Rewind

You need context.

Fourteen years ago I discover I can use the family computer to watch anime online.

I am an awkward kid. I devour books by the dozen.
I'm pretty much alone

Thirteen years ago, I write already - bits and bobs of my "novel", in my school notebooks. Years later I'll realise it was already fanfiction; a self insert in a world just like ~~Star~~, but slightly to the left

I don't know that word, yet.



Twelve years ago, I get my grandma's laptop and discover

fanfiction by accident

you can do that?!

I stumble upon fan blogs, then fan theories, then fan skits where the characters "talk" with the blog's author

I get curious

What else can you do?

I'm too shy to talk ^{to} on those blogs. Still, I try, and I start dreaming of being old enough to dare
and fail

What
can I do?



I write my
first fic!
it's still up
somewhere
I forgot where tho



Eleven years ago, my internet's access hasn't been controlled by adult since I started using the computer on my own. and I am so grateful! but it should have been!

One of my friends mods for a forum - I get a bit better at talking to strangers on the internet.

I'll only doxx myself
thrice

I discover a small fandom i think less 40 peeps top. I read every fic I find, rewiewing as I go

I'm still awkward and terrified of strangers, but when an author I've been talking with tells me she and everyone else is on twitter I very much hesitate

but still I follow

Ten years ago I meet my friends

I don't know then they'll be my friends. I don't know then they'll change my life
yet

all I know is: we like the same things!

all I know is: we read, and write the same things!

all I know is: they're like me



Nine years ago I suddenly realise I like girls AND boys

uh oh

I learn about bisexuality through that small fandom

You can do that ?!!

yet

I still write in
my school rough
book



Life saves
counter 1

We start talking about deeper stuff we never stopped :)

I wanna be an animator!

└ go for it!

└ you'll do great!

└ go go go!

Seven years ago I get into art school. My book is good enough because I've been drawing fanart and illustrating fics and doodling for my fandom friends for three years now



Also I sent some
+ handwritten fics
through the post

Eight years ago, I have to choose my career. Once again the fandom is the one to cheer me on the most



I used
the high
school's
printer to
scan
then
email
them



one of the new loves

Six years ago, that small fandom starts to dislocate we all have new loves, the series we talked about don't upload anymore, a guy gets booted off the group because he's an abuser and an a2

*: Except SPN

The core group we've become stays, tho

Nowadays it feels like it'll stay forever

Five years ago, my partner comes to my city for their studies. We met through fandom, we bonded over fandom, we courted via fics and fanarts. Now we live together.

And it's awesome!

I is it still counting for a QPR?



Also five years ago, our wisest member gets married. We talk RPF omegaverse during the dinner - she's wise: she put us all around one table, to spare the rest of her family. In our common gift, we hide a page full of her most unhinged tweets. We all cried when she kissed her husband.

Four years ago Covid hits

I manage to get the heck out of my mom's house, but spend the lockdown alone in our tiny flat, working as much as I can bear on my end of year film. Distance already grated, but this is worse.

Not very much



Throughout that lonely spring stuck in two rooms my friends keep me sane. We watch movies, we play games together. When lockdowns stop and summer starts, we plan a vacation together. It's the best week I ever had, I tell my partner when we get home.

(I make peace with the fact I may not be a girl)

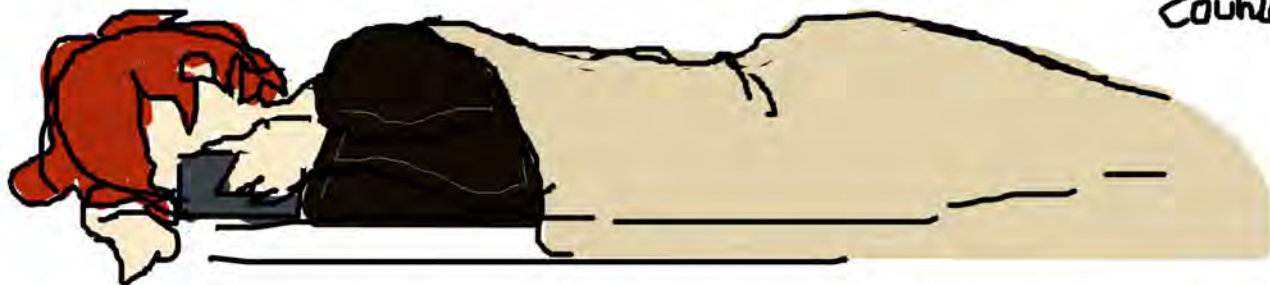
Jury's still out as to what I actually am tho



life saver counter 11

Three years ago, school is remote and I spend a week hidden under the covers, barely existing. My one link to the outside world is an english speaking discord based around an author's works. I'm still awkward and so not chatty but I cant answer anyone else.

life
saves
counter III



life saves counter:
stopped counting

Two years ago, I get two months of on and off sick leave. I graduate. Through it all we keep talking and fangirling. I start creating again

Last year, for the third year in a row, we vacation together. Most of us live in the same city now (well, have been for the last three years) and we spend hours in public transport to go to one or the other's flat. We go to concerts together, to the movies, spend new years and halloweens and king's galette and chandeleur and birthdays together

duration: 1 hr
worth: yes

Country reveal! oui oui baguette all along...



This year I suddenly realise it's been ten years since I talked to them for the very first time. I get emotionnal. Two of us either left or are going to leave town. It feels like the end of an era. It also feels like going back to us being no less than four hours away from each other like we used to - except now we have train money. Still I cried when we had to say goodbye in front of their cardboard boxes.

I met my friends ten years ago. They taught me almost everything I know about being an adult. I don't know where I'd be without them.

And it's all thanks to some guys filming themselves and posting that to youtube in 2012.

I get vertigo when I think about it.



Where would I be without them? Where would I be without that small RPF fandom ten years ago?

I like to think we'd have found each other anyway.



I'm pants at using my words, always have been. I can't be sure I ever told them how much I love them. How much they are my life's central star and I only revolve around them. They changed me to the core. There is no words I know that are strong enough.

Friends, if you ever come this way, know that you are loved. Know that without you fandoms might as well not have ever existed. Know our canon is the one I would never change - it's already all I ever wanted.

Echoes from a distance

Phi



saintemiliosandoz [Follow](#)

doomed by the narrative and haunted by the narrative and a secret third thing (narrating the narrative)

#this is about louis and claudia #and john silver

When I met K. on *fanfiction bloody dot com* in high-school, 700 kilometers separated us. Yet, those 700 kilometers were not as far as I was from knowing we would end up being best friends and roommates for years.

2014 was simpler times, it was the best of times – or at least, a pre-MeToo times when most of our favorite Youtubers had not been called out yet for grooming girls our age or younger, which made the Internet easier to navigate than the confusing, scary IRL world. K. and I bonded over many comedy web-series and YouTube channels over the years

(the word “content” had no meaning in this context back then) and among those videos, the finest of arts, *la crème de la crème*.

We met thanks to the Epic Rap Battles of History channel.

It would be an understatement to say that we enjoyed the show differently. K. was out there writing 8k words of post-apocalyptic AU while I was mostly here for the vibes, getting 1/8th of the jokes and cultural references of the battle, but we always waited for each other to watch it. Which was new for me, as I did not know

any popular shows then and was used to enjoying things on my own. Sharing my enthusiasm with a soon-to-be-best-friend was an experience in itself, an experience that slowly cracked me out of my shell (in every sense: creatively, personally, LGBTQ-ingly) and soon enough my keyboard was firing with the most horrific “lol XD” crackfictions I could have possibly come up with. Writing was no longer a desert of bottled up emo teenager feelings pouring over a notebook page that no one would ever read, it became a sandbox of experimentation, humor and fun. I became a better novelist on *fanfiction*

bloody dot com than any expensive writing course could have ever taught me, because I was no longer talking to myself.

And just like that, by the sole power of a fandom of two (2) french-speaking high-schoolers, I met a bunch of people I'm still friends with a decade later.

It's 2017 and I'm on what feels like the 800th train of the day on an extremely hot day of July. I'm eighteen and M. and S. seventeen, which means I'm in charge. We left Paris at dawn and crossed the country North to South on a bus, got stuck in awful traffic without water or food, missed our correspondence and sprinted through the station out of breath and panicked to catch the last train of the day like idiots. Somehow, this disaster of a journey gives me something real to worry about instead of spiraling like I usually do about stupid things such as: Will K. like me IRL like she did on Twitter? Will it be awkward? Will this week-end

change our dynamic? How will our first conversation go?

S. shakes my arm to get me off the train. The three of us jump down to the platform, exhausted and red-faced and I think a million things, I think that's her, that's her hair, I recognize her from Skype, I think please don't fuck this up, and I walk up to her with open arms and I yell as loud as I can, unaware of the future irony of this sentence, "Oh for God's sake fuck you, I am never going to your damn place ever again."

Over the years, the fandom of once 40-ish people fell apart, as Youtubers deserted the platform to pursue a new career or were called out for grooming, threatened for a defamation lawsuit and then vanished into thin air. It slowly diluted to a little group of 20, 15, to the actual 9 folks that are now our central core, our "squad." There has been a wedding, a lesbian civil union, messy breakups and reconciliation, but by a miracle I could not

explain myself, despite the dramas and the geographic distance, our bond never broke. It strengthened, even.

Our fandoms evolved as we grew up together. From Youtubers we moved to *BBC Sherlock*, swiftly replaced by *Hamilton* in 2017 (God knows why), leading to a pipeline of musicals of *uneven quality* to say the least (sometimes I wished *Dear Evan Hansen* didn't find me), upgrading to *The Mirror Visitor* series. Some of us even landed on Twitch, where some of the OG Youtubers we used to like found their true calling, closing the loop perfectly without them knowing. Whatever the material was, we always found a way to interact with it together, writing collabs, leaving comments, commissioning fanarts. Fandom was no longer the pretext of our friendship – we all lead adult lives and didn't need an excuse to hang out together—but rather the way we choose to express it. We kept reinventing our bond, universe after universe.

Personally, apart from the 2015–2018 mania (my high-school years, in fact), I have always been more drawn to my original work rather than fanfiction, and had no interest in interacting with strangers who were not already part of my close circle. I'm so glad that despite this clear disparity, my squad found and kept me exactly as I was – introverted, awkward and incapable of using Tumblr. Now I don't mean to brag, but we've been on vacation together in the same place for four years. And everytime I take the bus to join them, I remember my awful journey to meet K. in the south of France back in 2017, and I bring a snack.

“And how would you name your cat with K. ?” My therapist asks. We’ve been working together for a year and a half now. She’s been gently preparing me to break ties with my dad, quit school and find my own path, as scary as it sounds. She keeps mentioning something along the lines of, quote unquote, “building foundations.” I’m

not sure to know what this means.

“Oh, I dunno.” I say. “Something dumb, like Crackers or Omelet.” For the last eighteen months, I’ve gotten quite good at downplaying my thoughts and feelings in front of her. If I act like moving in with K. isn’t a big deal that is about to change my life forever, then it won’t be. Of course, she doesn’t buy it for a second.

“You’re building yourself a home.” She says. “Somewhere safe.” I burst into tears.

When K. left her town for university, a year after the pandemic, we decided to live together. I made tons of visits to finally end up in the apartment of a relative's relative of hers. I had never seen this place before moving in, not even in pictures, but at this point I was trusting K. with my life. She said, “It’s only for a few months, we’ll move out once we find better,” and then we never did.

If there is one thing I've learned in the last few years, it is that home can be a website, a person, a fandom, a very old-looking but oh-so-cheap flat. Home is whatever you want it to be. More than roommates, K. and I shared our meals, our group of friends and new challenges. For three years we both grew in our own, sometimes difficult way. We supported each other through grief, depression, heartbreak and the never-ending pain of “what the fuck do we eat for dinner.” For three years, we witnessed our respective day-to-day lives and made our way through the IRL mess. My life skyrocketed as I healed from severe depression, found an amazing job in publishing and met my very-much-long-term-

If there is one thing I've learned in the last few years, it is that home can be a website, a person, a fandom, a very old-looking but oh-so-cheap flat.

thank-you girlfriend. None of this could have been possible without the quiet life we built with K., the game nights at our place with everyone, the TV shows we watched together on the couch, and so on.

Hell. None of this could have been possible without the Epic Rap Battles of History.

“It’s kind of scary,” I say at dinner. “You have access to the most unpolished, unfiltered version of me. Not softened or anything.” “It’s a bit late to worry about that.” K. replies without a flinch, serving pasta. I smile at my plate, relieved.

Early 2024, the ERB guys announce their live tour on Instagram, with European dates—Amsterdam, London. I show my phone to K. She pauses, looks back at me and says in all seriousness, “Here’s the plan: we go to Amsterdam. We don’t tell anyone else. And on gig night, we meet them and randomly post a selfie out of context.” It is insane and

laughable. It sounds exactly like something we would do. I shake her hand. “Deal.”

Two days before moving out, we host our goodbye-party with all our friends. A few hours before the guests arrive, K. barges into the kitchen, phone in hand, shows me her screen and goes with the most poker face ever: “The Harris-Trump battle drops in thirty minutes.”

The concert took place in a bar called Bitterzoet, bitter-sweet, which could not be a better word to describe how K. and I felt that night. At this point, we both agreed to pursue our own paths – leaving the city to find a job for one, moving in with a partner and trying for a master’s degree for the other. We knew this summer would be our last as roommates. We wanted to enjoy it and make memories. What better occasion than this?

True to ourselves, K. knew all of the lyrics by heart and I just cheered and nodded enthusiastically for the whole

gig. When our turn came for the meet and greet, my legendary lifelong social anxiety with a sprinkle of awkwardness turned into the most genuine desire for connection I could ever feel in that moment, and I spontaneously cut everyone off to blurt “We came from France! We met 10 years ago because of you guys and now we live together and we made it all the way from Paris to see your show!”

They make a point of trying to speak French before taking the picture. One of them asks, “Do you want a picture each, or two pictures of all of us together?” What a strange question. The possibility of not being together in the photo never occurred to us.

The last night before moving out, after the party’s ended and everyone is gone, we sit on the couch amongst the boxes and we do a tier-list of our favorite eras together: the TV-shows we watched, the movie premiere where K. got recognized by other fans, the streamers we liked. The Bitterzoet concert goes all

over the top of the list. “We can’t say it’s S-Tier,” K. says, “we need to make it a special category. It’s a pilgrimage, in fact.” I oblige. When we’re done classifying everything, she asks, “Do you want to watch some Youtube?”, and we do.

When we post the selfie on Twitter in the middle of the night, my phone buzzes with a bunch of “OH MY GOD” responses from the whole group chat. These creators might never know how intense we were – the frantic texting IT’S OUT when we lived across the country, the equally insane WAIT FOR ME when we lived together, the clenching hands when we bought the concert tickets – but our little group knew how much this concert meant to us, how intertwined these

two American dude-bros are with our friendship, and this is all that matters. To me, fandom is a powerful way of building bridges between our own life and the various works of fiction that mirrors it. It’s finding minds saddled with the same urge of telling stories, coming together like puzzle pieces.

There are epic duos everywhere in the world. Some of them become famous, most of them don’t. Whether your friendship is witnessed by ten thousand subscribers or a handful of loyal nerds from *fanfiction bloody dot com*, the feeling of wholeness remains the same.

As I pour out words on my keyboard, a familiar voice answers me in the distance, like an echo.







At that time, I had Jungkook as my profile picture.

She didn't have a member as her Twitter icon.

Soon after, she lost interest in the group and mostly posted about a period drama.

I stayed within the BTS fandom and didn't find the series particularly interesting.

Naturally, our conversation steered

away from K-Pop and

focused on our everyday life.



She told me about her upcoming exam.

I tried sharing with her a note I made from a year prior.
Even though we were under two different educational systems,
I hoped it was at least similar enough to be useful for her revision.

I posted it on a website and sent her a link.
I had never used the site before, so I was unsure whether the document was shared correctly.

Until this day, I still don't know if she managed to access it.





The Curious Case of My Fandom Friendship

Cassie Liu

If you asked me half a year ago whether I could imagine myself being in an amazing friendship with someone I got to know from my current fandom (which is Mysterious Lotus Casebook by the way), my answer would be ‘no’ without hesitation. However, we are all aware that life is unpredictable, even for an antisocial person who tries to be invisible and solo in almost every fandom she has been in, and here I am, writing about the curious case of my fandom friendship (thank you F. Scott Fitzgerald for the title although it might not be 100% accurate).

Admittedly, I have very limited experience in this topic, but I guess the beauty of many fandom friendships lies in originating from the pure appreciation of one’s

talent, as in my case. It was a random day, and I saw the recommendation of Dawn’s (my friend’s name) works on Weibo. I cannot remember what the recommendation was about, but I can still recall how amazed I was when I read the specific work set in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The work hit me immediately and I cried so hard at the last chapter. I always believe that one’s works reveal a lot about the author, consciously or not, and at that moment, I really felt a magical connection between

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us. More interestingly, she also likes to post screenshots of the movies she watched and as a movie fanatic and two-time film festival volunteer, there is simply no chance that I do not resonate with her. After rereading the work a few times, I messaged her expressing how much I like her works, because I was not comfortable leaving a comment. The first correspondence happened in July, and we gradually became closer and closer. The topics expanded from fandom only stuff to everyday life and serious social issues. Of course, brainstorming together about our OTP in the fandom is a big part, but I am glad that we are more than that. Two months ago, I boosted a post on Mastodon which somewhat summarizes my fandom friendship,

“Fanfics are mainly about two women, one as the writer and the other as the reader.” I am fortunate to come across her works and admire them, and she is delighted to have someone who cherishes the fruits of her efforts and gives useful feedback. I am fortunate to find a similar soul through fanfics and she is delighted to get a friend from her dedication to the fandom. Even better, we have inspired each other in terms of creation. Before I met her, I made a few fanvids about our OTP but they were mostly taken down due to “copyright issues”, which was extremely discouraging to me. It was she who spoke highly of my works, encouraged me to continue the journey of fanvid making and provided me with new ideas

so that I could try something different. On the other hand, she also based some of her works on my headcanons and both of us were satisfied with the final products.

I am pretty sure this has been iterated a million times, but I want to highlight that my fandom friendship indeed transcends time and space. There was once 6, 12-hour, now 13-hour time difference between us. We are at different stages of life. Nonetheless, nothing stopped us from developing this friendship. I am surprised how open we can be to each other, but I never question our sincerity. No matter how this is going to end, the memory is a precious treasure to me, and I will definitely look back with a smile.

It's a Dangerous Business, Going Out Your Door

Nienna Nir

Many, many years ago now when Facebook was something only college kids could use, I started down a road. I didn't know where it led but it was the turn of the century and that way lay a hell of a lot of Lord of the Rings fanfic. I'd been in the fandom since before The Lays of Beleriand, so I knew my stuff and I expected to find some really spectacular tales in a world that was as close to a home as I'd ever had.

What I didn't expect was who I'd meet on that road, a road that ran straight through Yahoo groups. I met a lot of people but among them, I met twelve women. Twelve women who were beautiful, confident, sexy, and brilliant and among the most

extraordinary individuals I have ever encountered in my entire life. I was at least a little bit in love with each and every one of them in the way you can only be in love with someone you adore blindly beyond all sense and reason.

We headed out together into Middle Earth and we built a world of our own within it, full of adventure and death and mayhem and life and beauty and everything that makes getting up in the morning something worth doing. We wrote and wrote, and we cried and laughed, and then wrote some more. It was the very best time of my entire life.

And then something tragic happened. They wanted to meet in real life.

And then something tragic happened. They wanted to meet in real life.

To say I was petrified would be inadequate by ridiculous proportions. The mere thought of awkward, invisible me in the presence of these goddesses was enough to make me lose sleep at night. But I smiled and nodded, projecting false confidence as I helped plan. All the while visions of myself as the sole misfit in a room full of pretty, perfect people making my head swim to the point of anxiety.

You see I spent time with them every day, I knew them,

and I knew me. Up until that point I'd hid my social ineptitude behind really good proofreading. I was painfully aware that real life didn't have spell check, and I wasn't likely to be able to carry on the charade in the real world for more than about five minutes. I was properly haunted by the knowledge that I could never measure up to the sheer coolness I was about to encounter. Then I met them.

And they were awkward and elegant, and serious and silly, and tall and short, and shy and outgoing, and a bit nervous, and as different as any twelve people on the planet have ever been from each other.

They were Beautiful. Each and every one of them.

I learned something I will never forget; That we can see people through a lens of our own assumptions, so distorted that we can no longer see the real person. We fill in the blanks of what we can't make out and we're almost always wrong. And we miss so much. We are, all of us, the awkward wallflower and the unapproachable goddess simultaneously. Schrodinger's FanGirls. But we don't have to be, we can open the box if we're brave enough. We can let others see us.

I didn't know where the journey would take me, but it turns out that if you take the right people with you it doesn't actually matter. It's been over twenty years and I will never stop being grateful for all they have taught me, for all the sights I would not have seen and places I would

not have gone and who I would not have been without them.

The twelve Wallflower Goddesses stepped out of real life and onto the page and they have been a part of everything I have written in this century. There is no story of mine that has not been touched by their wisdom and experience. They have been the hero and the villain and sometimes both at once and they will now live immortal so long as my stories last. I can think of no better gift to grace them with except perhaps just one more adventure.

Mellyn nin, the road calls once more.

The uniqueness of fandom friendships and participation culture in the specification of the context across K-pop fandoms

Boo

What makes fandom friendship and the changes in fandom communities unique? The purpose of this essay is to examine the uniqueness of fandom participation culture in the specification of the context across K-pop fandoms. By understanding the concept of fan labor and fan practices, utilizing some frameworks in the participatory culture and personal experiences, this paper aims to explore some of the outcomes and significance of fandom friendships other than creating a sense of belonging and having monetary contributions within the community.

In discussing the uniqueness of fandom friendships, it is essential to recognize some

of the properties of participatory culture and its effects on fandom friendships in various types of expression, considering popular fandom culture is one of the modern ways for us to interpret the audiences of mass media culture. The framework introduced by Jenkins refers to participatory culture as a flourishing community within a networked culture categorized by low barriers in artistic expression and civic engagement and as a means of understanding how the media fandom runs (Jenkins, H., 2018). When we talk about some of the first impressions of fandom participation in K-pop, the first thought we may encounter will be the immaculate amount of hashtags or a significant

amount of information that pops out on search engines and various online platforms. This phenomenon results from fan efforts and a testament to their dedication and influence in shaping modern entertainment culture. It's the fans who are constantly putting effort into teaming up and creating an impact, and it's their hard work that we see reflected in the online platforms and countless hashtags. Such a level of organized teamwork is vibrant evidence of the level of flourishing of a community through civic engagement in displaying their passion to the public and elevating their artistic expressions through their lens of understanding as an entity of community.

Part of the uniqueness of K-pop fandom is rooted in some of the topics and social issues that they have attempted to convey other than being part of the ‘gifting economy’; in some other words, these communities may have attempted to expand their ‘gifting economy’ onto broader spectrums other than the idol, or the fandom itself. The collaborative efforts in attempting to bring a more positive effort to the community and the environment surrounding the community are one of the uniqueness that K-pop fandom possesses. For instance, the fandom of IU has a tradition of donating to multiple charities under their idol’s name in celebration of her debut anniversary every year, where they donated 225 million Won in 2024 (Minsoo, K., 2024), and in a total of 110 million Won in 2023 (Lim, 2023). Such a level of fandom engagement in striving for a better cause is immaculate and a great example of displaying how the fans in the community are not simply acting in the role for

monetary contribution but also in attempting to fulfill social responsibility and fully utilizing the ability and power of cohesion brought by the fandom.

Another topic the fandom community has been bringing up is the awareness of constructing gender-specific self-identity and female empowerment. While this has been a more subtle topic in relation to the fandom, raising the concept of constructing gender-specific self-identity and holding onto the ideology of “being true to who you are” are some of the vibrant distinctiveness of K-pop fandom compared to other communities. Several generations of K-pop idol groups have brought this topic up in some of the lyrics, yet the concept of empowering females has only emerged recently and become a more general topic open for discussion through the interactions among the fandom. One of the earliest influences emerged among 2nd generation of idol groups, where

female groups like 2ne1 and f(x) expressed the ideology of empowering females through their gender-neutral stage appearances and lyrics, Sistar being one of the groups that displayed a brand new perspective on East Asian beauty standard as being one of the few groups that embraced themselves with darker skin tones instead of solely pursuing fair skin and skinny body complexion (Li, X., 2024), and up to recently (G)I-DLE has released their song and album concept of “Tomboy” for their comeback that has brought the fandom’s attention in open discussion on such gender-specific topic (Li, X., 2024). Civic engagement in such discussions has shed light on feminism and postfeminism between idol groups and fans regardless of the preservative social climate among Asian countries other than its commercial success in countless streaming platforms supported by fans. Discussions focusing on social issues derived from fandom participatory culture

are vital in observing the level of participation within the community, understanding the focuses of the fandom of how these values bring people together other than their idol, and most importantly, attempting to break through some stigmatization and stereotypes on the perception of a “typical fandom.”

By understanding some of the opportunities for informal learning, the voluntary status of activities, and commitment to supporting individual and collective voices (Chris Kelty et al., 2015), it is crucial to utilize some of the perspectives from Chris Kelty’s seven dimensions of the contemporary participation framework for further exploration in the uniqueness of fandom participation culture across K-pop fandom. While some of the examples above are great examples in demonstrating the shared norms or measurements for assessing each other’s participation and committing to supporting individual and collective voices (Chris Kelty et al., 2015), opportunities

for informal learning are also areas that are significant in understanding the uniqueness of K-pop fandom with its low barrier in artistic expression within the community. The definition of informal learning may vary, but the specific definition can be perceived as “activities that are in pursuing knowledge outside of the area of the education system.” (Schugurensky, D., 2004) Since the collective dimensions of creating idiosyncratic meanings and personal associations under mass media consumption may be considered culturally significant as people come together (Jenkins, H., 2018), where the emergence of music video theories in K-pop fandom is one of the representative practices within the fandom that represents the informal educational approach of how the fandom interprets and conveys messages through their observations and previous knowledge in the context of fans’ literature. The music video itself provides enough foreground by displaying signifi-

cant plots and major events, while the ambiguity of the complete storylines can let the fandom attempt to fill up the rest of the blanks, interpret the messages behind the music video, and come up with their theories to create a new depth on the relationship of give and take through the interactions of the music video and its audiences (Louise, C., 2021), that differs from the familiar genre of fanfiction, where most of the plots in the storylines are solely made up by the fans. Though it may be a mere marketing strategy for the K-pop entertainment industry to come up with such a viewing experience for its audiences, it is undeniable that selling music with album concepts that preserve ambiguity and mystery is successful in capturing the fandom’s preferences and being more passionate in discussion for their interpretation.

This can also correlate to accessing the voluntary status of fandom activities and understanding the amount of fan labor and practices

between the involvement in decision-making and goal-setting that reflects the activeness within the K-pop fandom. There are many ways for K-pop fandom to gather and be active during the comeback of their idol group and other ways for them to participate in being an active member during those periods, especially on the works that are not for circulation (Tisha Turk., 2014), such as creating tutorials on how to vote in competition on music rankings, organizing backstage supports for their idols that are less likely to be appreciated or acknowledge in the fandom community. Though these activities might be insignificant compared to other ways of articulating an individual's passion for the community, fandom friendships typically start by bonding over completing insignificant tasks together and further teaming up to organize and involve other more extensive activities, such as organizing fan chants and materials for a concert. A scientific study completed in

2021 has shown that active K-pop fandom engagement has led to an increase in levels of social connectedness and self-esteem (Laffan, 2021), while the positive correlation may suggest that active engagement in the community has led to more opportunities in connecting with people that share same interests and similar values, leading to the positive psychological outcomes and relative higher well-being.

My personal experience in creating friendships in the K-pop fandom was being involved in frequent engagement with the people in the community, either as a contributor or a receiver. As a contributor, there are so many ways that you can stay active in the community, whether starting up a fan page, sharing information across the platform, creating fanart or promotion materials for your idols, or even contributing to the little things like voting, or increasing the internet flow by reposting to receive more attention from the public are

one of the many ways that a fan will do other than contributing monetarily. I got to meet friends by acting in the role of a receiver in the community by joining chatrooms that are only for active members within the community as we would share insights on topics in relation to the idol's comeback or fun facts about this community. I also received self-made goodies such as bookmarks and fan chant materials from them before attending the same concert. It was a special moment for me since the way they acted was different from how they communicated comparison to online and offline, especially how they were shyer in person and more enthusiastic online when they were sharing things they were passionate about, which made this experience more unique as you will realize that the people that are active in their own fandom in some way shared these same traits partially, but at the same time being passionate at a spectrum of topics and idols across the K-pop fandom contributing

In conclusion, the uniqueness of K-pop fandom friendships is mainly constructed under its active participatory culture, how fandom friendships create a vibrant culture of fan practices and convey messages that we all should be aware of in our societal settings.

in things that they are good at, which made me feel even more fascinated in experiencing the uniqueness of the fandom. The social engagement in K-pop fandom is mainly motivated by the idol and music itself, but what it has led these active members to continue staying active is more because of the community itself, how members in the community are passionate about sharing what they know, being appreciative and collectively put in efforts on some of the unseen works behind the scenes to keep the community active and running smoothly are another perspective of why this fandom

is vibrant and thriving among other communities.

In conclusion, the uniqueness of K-pop fandom friendships is mainly constructed under its active participatory culture, how fandom friendships create a vibrant culture of fan practices and convey messages that we all should be aware of in our societal settings. There are few perspectives explored in the context of the contemporary participation framework for further exploration of the uniqueness of fandom participation culture across K-pop fandom, including the opportunities for informal learning, the voluntary status of activities, and understanding the amount of fan labor and practices between the involvement in decision-making and goal-setting that reflects the activeness within the K-pop fandom has given a more profound understanding in the uniqueness of K-pop fandom and how fandom friendships intertwine in more complex subjects along the broad spectrum of active

participatory culture. The active participation within and across the fandom is not solely relying on the passion of the fans individually but also on the friendship and interpersonal relationships made along the way of pursuing personal interests and hobbies within the community, as well as discovering some hidden talents as individuals become more active engaging in the community. Though further exploration of the positive relationships and outcomes between fandom friendships and active participatory culture is needed for future discussions, but fandom friendships inevitably remain to be a healthy way for people sharing similar interests and values to come together and share a good cause with the community itself and the general society by as a reciprocation and utilize the medium of fandom to share broader messages and values along the way.

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things i want to say at magic the gathering but won't

mk zariel

after "things i will want to tell you on our first date but won't" by ryan van meter.

that i don't measure the value of a person by
their prowess at strategy games, but that i know
you're a good one if i come out to you and
you manage not to mention chandra naalar.
that streets of new cappenna is underrated
and selesyna is not in fact a cult, that nicol bolas

is drawn like a mediocre scifi character, that flavor text
is really just poetry for people too awkward
to read. that i will transition
alongside everyone here and regret it
as soon as i have to sign up for tournaments under
my deadname—that half the supposed guys here are
obviously closeted, that the trans meetup in the corner

of the convention is mildly underwhelming, that i know
you love me when you manage not to spread your cards and dice
across half the table. that my transness accepted like foil on commons—
nice but unnecessary enough to shine in the lights
of a convention hall that smells like soda and public humiliation
like forgetting.

玩球脑洞凹三活动特供版

阿菟

出场人物：球球—《大明王朝1566》严世蕃，明哥—《少林问道》明德，阿菟—阿菟。

球球：这回编的什么？

阿菟：嗯，大概就是，狗尾巴草戒指……

球球：我的老天爷啊，还能再俗套点儿吗！

阿菟：那要不，24K金狗尾草……

球球：你打算俗俗得正是吗！

阿菟：555对不起……

明哥：这种话他每天都得说，你还没习惯？

球球：她怎么可能不习惯啊！每天

都是这种小破段子！你说，上次写五百字以上的脑洞是什么时候啦！

阿菟：其实，最近有在搞一个……

球球：你还说要给我们画画来着呢！

阿菟：是，一直想着呢，就是一年多没拿笔……

球球：所以说！

阿菟：55555对不起……

球球：别总说对不起啦，赶紧把那个狗尾巴草戒指编完啊。

阿菟：我可以说已经完了吗……毕竟，就是一句话脑洞……

球球：拿我砚台来！

明哥：呵。今天的故事很好啊。每天的都很好。我们都知道，即使只有一句话，那也是你在这一天所能想到的最好的一句话。

阿菟：嗯！你们值得最好的！你们就是最好的！

明哥：那么，出现一点科幻元素，比如这只黄金狗尾草戒指是真正的纯金，100%金原子构成，如何？

阿菟：嗯嗯嗯，没错！明哥哥就是有本事给球球100%！

球球：或者就不改，就是一棵秋天

会变黄变脆一碰掉穗子的狗尾巴草，我跟明哥哥说，今年的戒指都完蛋了呢，明哥哥说，对呀对呀，冬天要来了，该打雪仗了，等明年春天，又该有野花编的戒指了，戒指就这么顺其自然生生不息地轮换下去。

阿菟：棒极了！那……今日任务完成，我撤啦！

球球：你这家伙应付了事逃走了对吧！

阿菟：我是不想打扰你们二人世界嘛！

◇

是的，我嗑的CP就是我的朋友。

他们又给我带来了新朋友。入了同好群，人不多，说话的更少，但会随机掉落粮食，吃起来非常开心，更开心的是由此知道“啊啊啊原来太太还没爬墙”。

关注了bot，有史料、有作品、有灵光一现奇思妙想、还有心有戚戚“请高柱私我”。加了很多小伙伴，都是诈尸型聊天对象，但那些

双方都间隔二十四小时以上才回复的消息居然能有来有回地持续下去, 几千几万条, 想找以前聊的某个梗还挺不容易呢。北极圈? 不怕。人心是热的。

看嘛! 就说我们明严特别好嘛!

Crack Brainrot - AO3 Special Edition

A-Tu

Appearing cast:	any more cliché!	wrote something over 500 words?!
Qiuqiu - Yan Shifan from 大明王朝1566 <i>Da Ming Wang Chao 1566</i> <i>Ming Dynasty in 1566 (TV)</i>	A-Tu: Then why not 24K car-at gold bristlegrass...	A-Tu: Actually, I've been working on something recently...
Big Brother Ming - <i>Ming De from</i> 少林问道 <i>Shaolin Wendao (TV)</i>	Qiuqiu: Two clichés don't make a right!	Qiuqiu: Yeah right, you even said you'd draw something for us!
A-Tu - the author	A-Tu: Sob sob, I'm sorry...	A-Tu: Y-yes, I've been thinking of it this whole time, it's just that I haven't picked up the pen in more than a year...
Qiuqiu: What are we making this time?	Big Brother Ming: He says this sort of stuff every day, haven't you gotten used to this yet?	Qiuqiu: Told you!
A-Tu: Mhm, something like, bristlegrass rings...	Qiuqiu: How could she not get used to this? It's always this sort of cheesy trope every day! You tell me then, when was the last time you	A-Tu: Sob sob, I'm sorry...
Qiuqiu: My god, could this be		

Qiuqiu: Well stop apologising all the time, hurry up and finish that bristlegrass ring then.

A-Tu: Can I say it's already finished...since, well, it's just one sentence of brainrot...

Qiuqiu: Get me my inkstone!

Big Brother Ming: Heh, today's story is pretty good. Every day is pretty good. Even if it's just one sentence, that's still the best sentence you can think of for today – we all know that.

A-Tu: Yup! You guys deserve the best! You *are* the best!

Big Brother Ming: Well then, why don't we add a bit of sci-fi element to things? Like this golden bristlegrass ring being genuine pure gold constructed from 100% gold atoms, what do you think?

A-Tu: Mhm hmm, that's right! Big Brother Ming, you certainly have the ability to give Qiuqiu 100%!

Qiuqiu: Or you could keep it

as it is, just a regular blade of bristlegrass that turns yellow and brittle in the autumn and starts shedding grains. I'll say to Big Brother Ming that this year's rings are all done for, and Big Brother Ming will say something like – that's right, winter is coming and it'll be time for snowball fights soon, then when the spring comes next year there should be rings braided from wildflowers again. In this way the rings will take their natural course, changing and renewing endlessly.

A-Tu: That's awesome! Okay then... today's mission is completed, I'm heading out now!

Qiuqiu: You're just running away after dealing with things, aren't you!

A-Tu: I just didn't want to disturb your lovers' bonding time!



Yes, the pairing I ship are my friends.

They even brought me new friends. I joined fan groups that don't have many members and even less chat activity, but there's random drops of content that I'm really happy to consume, and even happier to find out in this way that "aaah this creator hasn't left this fandom". I've followed fandom forums on Weibo with historical material, fanworks, sudden bursts of inspiration, and passionate cries of "OP please DM me!". I've added many companions as friends on social media, where our chats seem like they only happen once in a blue moon, but somehow even with both sides' replies being more than 24 hours apart we can still keep an active conversation going for thousands of messages, to the point that it can be difficult to find a meme shared before in the chat. Small fandom? That's nothing to be afraid of, human hearts are still vast.

See! I told you our Mingyan ship is really good!

My Friendships on Fanfiction.net Forums

Lianne

I have thought a long time about how to explain the personal importance of the friendships I made on fanfiction.net forums. Such a sentence itself might seem ludicrous and maybe embarrassing to the uninitiated—as if said by a person who thinks that Stevia tastes more wholesome than the real thing—but it is undeniably true that these relationships were the biggest positive factor towards my adolescent social development. This was not because I had few friends, and so any friends (even online ones) were better than none, but rather because fanfiction.net forums were uniquely positioned to nurture the particular child that I was. They were specifically good at encouraging environments that I doubt I could have found in person.

What were these forums? They were roleplay forums where people could write round-robin stories with their original characters; they were chatting forums to talk about fandom and fanfiction; they were writing challenge forums. They were the place I began to learn as a teenager how to be a friend, and subsequently, how to love—as a verb and a practice.

The love that was modeled for me at home was between and from well-meaning parents. But in the way that my mother spoke English, her third language, with a curled tongue, my parents spoke love without all the grammar intact. Neither of them learned the language of functional love growing up, or at least did not receive very many lessons in it. As a result, I was subject to various dysfunctions that made

it difficult to be a child, and I grew up isolated from my peers and with a hunger for connection.

Writing fanfiction, for me, was always an attempt to connect. I first joined fanfiction.net when I was twelve at the behest of one of my best friends from school. Though I had no intrinsic interest in the website, she did, and I was eager to please her. My first fanfiction was a one-shot of her favorite ship, which was from a show I had never even watched. I found the forums on my own and joined a few, but one that I joined when I was thirteen ended up sticking. We'll call it HG.

For six years, until HG closed because of participation decline, it was my internet home. In this forum house, each thread was a room with

different activities and purposes—word games, homework help, advice, etc. The main chat was like a kitchen table. Everyone was family or family friend; we were welcoming but tight-knit and therefore sometimes cliquish. We even made a forum family tree (though it was not a tree so much as a tangled knot of yarn) with different members being siblings, parents, wives, sisterwives, etc. We had inside jokes, traditions, and our own norms. We had our own slang and linguistic tics. We also had an oral history of the forum as conversation passed down stories of major forum changes and of members who no longer frequented the place. I spent hours writing fanfiction for the challenges, reviewing HG contest submissions, posting “spam” in the forum to heighten our post count for the forum rankings, and working on “prizes” for the contest winners. I recently spoke to a forum friend, and in describing the social atmosphere of this time and place, she simply said, “You just had to be there.”

It’s difficult to justify why these forums were so important to me and my development, or explain how they cultivated such a deep intimacy despite being technically public spaces with complete anonymity. We mostly did not know each other’s real names, ages, genders... until we were already friends, and maybe not even then. Yet, it was a forum member who first recognized that I might be being abused at home.

Being hurt as a child calcifies into the invisible core premises of self-disgust and shame; you fail to question these premises the same way you fail to question whether the sky is blue. It is simply blue, and you are simply disgusting. But my forum friendships and my involvement in HG encouraged me to plant and nurture the thought, ‘Maybe I am good, and also good at something.’ It was on HG that I was first supported by an adult regarding my queerness. I looked forward to my HG birthday celebration more

than anything offline, with members baking actual cakes and filming birthday videos. There was a dedicated thread for giving compliments to other members. HG nurtured my love for writing, and I later graduated college¹ with a degree in English. Through an adjacent forum, I also met the friend trio that became my life’s most constant fixture—and was also my big love story (because who said that platonic love can’t be a love story?)—until that friend group broke apart in my mid twenties. Outside of my parents, there aren’t people who have shaped me more.

My fanfiction forum friendships were not “just as good” as in-person friendships. The forum format was fertile ground for something incomparable: apples to oranges. Though I’ve written how this village showed up for me in the absence of my parents and in real life peers, it would be reductive to say that the forum was only so valuable to me because these

¹ This is where my love for writing died, but oh well.

holes existed. Where else could I have experimented with my identity and in a space where I was able to exist without a body, without gender? Where else could I have developed a sense of competence and belief in my capabilities, if not a forum where I organized events and helped make decisions about the group? Where else could I have practiced my sense of play into late adolescence, to create fun without physicality or given context?² These forums allowed me to grow in ways that I could not have in my in-person life. Though I can think of a few places where I could have accessed these things, like maybe a local community group if I had been able to secure transportation there, I cannot think of a place where I would have been able to do

² We played so many forum games. So, so many. And our prizes, if there were any, were high value rewards like “MS paint doodle” and “review on your fic.” HG was also skill-building; in creating prizes, events, and birthday gifts, I learned how to splice and layer audio in Audacity, how to build websites, how to use free graphic design software (before Canva!), and more—skills that helped me get my first job after college.

all of those things at once and show up as all of myself—much less access to that space every day.

Importantly, I had no adults in my real life who supported me in my entirety; I had no mentors. I found them at HG—the fellow queer member who DMed me words of support after I confessed being attracted to my next-door neighbor, a girl a grade ahead of me. The maths PhD student who helped me with my calculus homework. The writer whose work I admired and who encouraged me not to stop writing in college like she had. The adult who always responded to my chatter and told me that she thought I was kind and “even-keeled,” a word that reverberates in me to this day. Fandom spaces these days I’ve noticed are often more rigidly age-segregated (“minors DNI” is a common line, and friendships between adults and teenagers are seen as suspicious), which I do not have a problem with given the real threat of grooming. However, I am

very grateful to the kind adults on HG who took me under their wing and took me seriously, and I am sad for the kids out there who won’t experience that kind of mentorship. It is possible for there to be a friendship between a teenager and an adult; it should not look like friendship between peers, but a friendship can exist—and these friendships helped guide me into adulthood.

I think without these fanfiction forums my teenage life would have been much more difficult. Teenagers are learning who they are and how to care for others. Fanfiction forums gave me a safe playground to do both. When I say that my fandom friendships were one of my first opportunities to get into the practice of expressing love,

Teenagers are learning who they are and how to care for others. Fanfiction forums gave me a safe playground to do both.

this is not an exaggeration! I was having care modeled for me, and I was also practicing, however imperfectly, how to show it for others: through returning birthday celebrations, kind and thoughtful conversation, showing up for a friend through personal tragedy and grief and trauma, flexing the muscle of paying attention and noticing, or learning how to see and accept someone's contradictions and complications. I developed deep friendships with a few of the members I met through these forums, and though they did not last forever, that in itself propagated invaluable lessons. These fandom friendships lasted for almost all of the formative decade of my young adulthood, and they changed me.

Though HG has been laid to rest for years and I am no longer close to anybody I met on those forums, the

connections live on. Some HG members read and commented on (or R&Red...) a draft of this essay, for example. And last year, I traveled to the other side of the world to attend the wedding of an HG member, whom I met when she was fourteen. Of course, her maid of honor was also another member of HG. Photos of this wedding appeared in our annual HG newsletter; each fall, members send me photos and updates from the past year, and I assemble a PDF newsletter for us. Scarcely, we've all grown up.

The adult that I am today certainly contains the child that I once was. Instead of shedding childhood like skin, I think I grew rings around it like a tree. My roots are strong, I hope. I also hope that spaces like HG continue on the internet. HG remains in my memory a special moment that cannot be recre-

ated, but I know that new spaces are filling the niche that HG once did. Where fans, good people, and the desire to connect exist, so do good communities.



Authors

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Boo is just a Shawol girl living in Shawol world

Cassie Liu has been reading fanfictions for more than 10 years and is a very proud OTW volunteer. Fandom experience is such an important part of her life that she cannot imagine living without it. Right now, making fanvids for her OTP is her biggest passion.

Iris Cabin. Proud overthinker. Indoor type of person. Love all art forms. Working on her handwriting.

Kalincka is a fic writer who forged her first Internet friendships back in 2014. Thanks to fandoms, she's now a certified linguist and has published a master's thesis on how to translate legal topics regarding fan fiction. She screams death to the author and long live fan culture, for as an aromantic person, she met her favorite people on Earth through transformative works. She also joined the OTW as this zine was assembled!

Lianne organized and formatted this zine. They have been a volunteer with Fanhackers since 2023 for which they have written blog posts about fan studies and fan archives. They love friendship and their friends. You can email them (about their essay, fandom friendship, or just to chat) at snailianne@gmail.com.

Melle Cee is currently a fourth-year university student in Canada. As mentioned in her Zine, she has participated in fandom culture since the emergence of digital technologies and media in the early 2000s. Through this Zine, she hopes to share her experiences and reflections regarding the fandom community.

I'm **Merle**, a small nerd nowadays working in public libraries. I am living in several fandoms at once, thanks to my awesome group of friends I met in fandom years ago. They are very important to me; and I hope this work can showcase that.

mk zariel {it/its + masc terms} is a transmasculine neuroqueer theater artist, Best Of The Net and Monarch Award nominated poet, movement journalist, and BashBack aligned anarchist translocally rooted in the Great Lakes region. the author of *VOIDGAZING* (2026, Whittle Micropress) and *BOY APPARITION* (2025, Vinegar Press), it creates conflictual spaces for trans survival and queer desire—spaces of insurgent genders, mutual aid

beyond the nonprofit gaze, and the kind of care that negates (and negation that provides care). BashBack! remains close to its heart, as do anarchonihilism/egoism, experimental theater, and the defiant tenderness of queer collectivity. mk's organizing is often underground, but its poetics and podcast crackle with the same unruly energy: community as generative+atemporal destruction, poetry as direct action. Oh, and according to anarchistnews.org—"zariel quotes the Principia Discordia, which is kind of funny" and "what is explicitly said about chaos is...fine?".

Its writing has appeared in *Querencia Press*, *Akpata*, *J Journal*, *Witches Magazine*, *Fifth Estate*, *ANMLY*, *OurLives Wisconsin*, *Library Of Eris*, *Oyster River Pages*, and *Seattle Journal of Social Justice*, among many others. It contributes columns to *Asymptote* and the *Anarchist Review of Books*, its mixed media work is featured through Open Sorcery, and it authors the advice column DEBATE ME BRO and hosts the podcast THE CHILD AND ITS ENEMIES. it has also collaborated with Urban Ganges on a line of themed reed diffusers. mk is the author of eleven self-published zine projects, and performs regularly at anarchist gatherings, zine fests, and queer liberation events. You can find its offerings, commissions, and chaotic love letters to the world at mkzariel.carrd.co.

Nienna Nir is an award winning Cosplayer, fanfiction author, panelist, and blogger from Sarasota, FL. She is the Guild Master for Tampa Bay Area Cosplayers and Costumers, a creative network for experienced and emerging cosplayers to share and learn new skills and techniques. Nienna has been routinely publishing transformative works online in a number of fandoms for over twenty years and has been active in Fandom since the 70's. She shares her wide range of experiences in her panels talking about fandom history and philosophy as well as mostly true tales of bygone fandom eras.

Olivia Fox (she/her) is a passionate writer and a fourth-year university student based in Toronto. With a deep-rooted involvement in fan culture, Olivia has spent years exploring and contributing to various fandoms, honing her skills in storytelling and creative expression. Her writing not only reflects her love for the narratives that inspire her but also engages with the vibrant communities that celebrate them. As she navigates her academic journey, Olivia continues to blend her academic pursuits with her creative passions, fostering a unique voice in the world of fan fiction and beyond.

Phi is a French non-binary author who started writing fanfiction in his high-school years. Now pursuing a degree in children's literature studies, he writes his own novels and short stories and even posts, very occasionally, his Mirror Visitor fanfiction on AO3. He has been friends with his fandom companions for a decade.

